



**A** discussion on ABC National about inherited genes made interesting listening. Only now are medical scientists starting to touch on the periphery of this fundamental subject.

Perhaps one day there will be a scientific explanation as to why some of us love the sea and others fear it. Certainly, our recent forefathers must have had an affinity for seagoing adventure to do what they did in discovery and commerce. Boating and the sea are in the blood of many of us, and may explain our fascination with venturing offshore, ocean voyaging, and fishing.

The "unforgiving sea" as described in my favorite wartime novel HMS Ulysses. *"The convoy came steadily up from the west, rolling heavily in cross seas, rich argosy, and a magnificent prize for any wolf pack. Eighteen ships, fifteen big modern ships, three medium tankers, all carrying freight more valuable and infinitely more vital than any fleet of Spanish galleons ever knew. Tanks, planes, and petrol. more valuable at this time than gold and jewels, spice and silks . . ."*

Hemmingway's *"The Old Man and the Sea"* provides further an insight into what it is like to be born with this gene. Hemmingway writes about the old man *"Everything about him was old except his eyes and they*

*were the same colour as the sea, and were cheerful and undefeated"*.

Love of the sea and respect for the sea go hand in hand. Love of the sea is in the gene; respect for the sea comes from experience, and the gaining of knowledge. Pleasure boating knowledge is gained over time; when we first go out on our grandfather's boat, we start learning to respect the sea, and try to understand its moods. Handling lines, refueling, steering, look out, routine maintenance, and the thousands of other skilled activities are not acquired overnight. Like a child learning to speak, it is part of the total boating process. For those fortunate to have the opportunity to grow up mucking around in

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boats, the process is perhaps like having a car driver's learner's licence for 12 months before going for the test.

For those who come to love boating later in life, the experience and learning process can be difficult and stressful. There is a saying that launching boats causes more divorces than wallpapering. In fact, sometimes it can be a totally frightening experience.

I have an acquaintance who bought a new single sterndrive 28-foot cruiser from Pittwater, and was encouraged by the sales man to take it to Sydney Harbour, with his wife aboard, in fresh conditions. When they got to Middle Harbour they

never used the boat again.

In another case I was asked to help bring a 34 foot cruiser from Pittwater to Sydney with a very early morning start. I asked if there was a compass aboard and was told that the dealer laughed at this and said "Mate, just keep Australia on the right!" As we got out into Pittwater, a dense winter fog came down the adjacent Hawksbury River, and we had to wait for it to clear.

Experience tells you: if it can happen, it will.

If the so called professional selling the boat gives embellished advice where does the less experienced boater start?

The training schools such as the Australian Boating College offer an excellent entry and qualification course. It is the best birthday present you can give a teenager. The excellent publication "Safe Boating" put out by all the State Marine Authorities should be on every boat. Why boat retailers do not supply this free booklet with every boat sold is another mystery to me.

Stand at any ramp during busy times and you will be impressed at the competency of most skippers. Years of experience is obvious. Most appreciate that it takes time to pick up the tricks of the process, can pick the inexperienced person, and give assistance and pass on information and techniques. You stop learning when you stop asking questions.

The totality of features that is boating makes it all worthwhile.

For those who are still on the learning curve, do not be self-conscious. Arrange to go offshore in company and join a fishing club. Even the most experienced person never stops learning. Look at Neil Dunstun with a new boat, and a 4-stroke motor. He is still learning, and he will be the first to agree that learning is also part of the pleasure.

Having said all this, there is still a minimum level of competency required. This includes basic knowledge of rules of the road, safety

procedures and importantly, trip planning. It is the responsibility of the owner operator to become competent. Legislators can only do so much.

It's a bit like bicycles. You do not need a licence to ride a bicycle, but the law says you must wear a helmet. The requirement to wear lifejackets or to have life jackets readily available in boats that operate at speeds less than 10 knots is the only answer the State Governments have.

What else can they do? Especially when no qualifications are required, and boat manufacturers provide no facilities for stowage, protection, and ready access of these essential items in most small boats under 4 metres.

Tinnies, for example are a very functional craft and meet the requirements of most owners as a low maintenance and effective means of transport. They are fit for the purpose they are designed for, but here is the rub - what happens when incompetent persons use them in conditions outside the intended purpose, and how many operators are incompetent? A few fools make life more difficult for all of us.

There is a procedure used by sailing instructors. The first thing they ask a raw crew is "Who is the look out?"

The correct answer, of course, is *"Everyone!"*

Likewise we are all communicators of knowledge. Most advice and comments that you offer will be graciously accepted, so do not let the odd p...off's put you off. And above all, keep asking questions, even if you get ten different answers.

Now that's boating.

#### **F&B**

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